

**CONNECTICUT VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
TESTIMONY TO THE CGA ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE REGARDING SB
6396 AN ACT CONCERNING VETERINARIANS AND DRUG PRESCRIPTIONS**

March 9, 2009

Messrs. Chairmen and Members of the Environment Committee:

We represent the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, which includes over 95% of Connecticut licensed veterinarians as its members.

We believe that HB 6396 is an unnecessary and redundant proposal that will do nothing to alter the relationship that exists between veterinary client, animal patient and veterinarian and that that relationship is as it should be. Existing guidelines and laws already provide a framework for the veterinarian's professional behavior, which includes guidance for, and consequences of, veterinarian - client communication.

The Veterinarian's Oath reminds us we must use our professional skills to benefit society and relieve animal suffering, conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the American Veterinary Medical Association's Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics. Our professional motto, *Primum Non Nocere*, "first do no harm", further highlights our responsibility to both our patients and clients.

The American Veterinary Medical Association's Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics requires that we first consider the needs of the patient, that we abide by the Golden Rule, that we be honest and fair and obey the law. These Principles also require that we inform our client of the expected results, risks and costs of a proposed treatment regimen.

Finally, Connecticut law (CGS 20-202) requires that we maintain ourselves professionally competent and skillful in our work or we may face disciplinary action by the Board of Veterinary Medicine, which operates under the auspices of the Department of Public Health. The broad oversight by both the Board and the Department, takes into account all forms of treatment whether medical or surgical, and puts the onus of defending ones conduct and clinical judgment onto the licensed veterinarian. This responsibility to maintain an appropriate standard of care remains as a check on any casual or careless behavior that might occur and serves to reinforce the ordinary exercise of conscience in the licensee.

Inherent in each of these dictums is that clear and open communication with our client, the consumer of veterinary services is essential. Communication within the context of the client - animal - veterinarian relationship is the coin-of-the-realm of veterinary practice. Using it effectively enables us to assist our clients to make good choices with respect to their care of their animals, as well as maximizes our potential to assist them to do so. Conversely, using it poorly makes a skilled clinician mediocre. There is just no substitute for good client communication.

A failure to communicate then, especially as to the merit or hazard of a given course of action, is inherently understood to be a negative influence on the client - animal - veterinarian relationship and our ability to maintain it. Clients who feel inadequately informed are quick to notice and quicker still to move on to a veterinarian with better communication skills. Thus the maintenance of the client - animal patient - veterinarian relationship requires effective, complete and honest communication, and this is a powerful motivator to the professional veterinarian to ensure it occurs.

HB 6396, a seemingly well-intentioned proposal requiring "complete" risk communication with respect to prescribing medication is therefore redundant and unlikely to improve client - veterinarian communication or further motivate poor communicators to do better. The hazards and penalties for the licensee already exist and need not be further repeated.

Every practicing veterinarian knows they are expected to provide reasonable and appropriate information about the potential risks and benefits of any given course of treatment. This assessment of risk is, by its very nature, a product of the synthesis of textbook knowledge and practitioner experience and judgment. This element of judgment, while fraught with the vagaries of human error, cannot be removed from this equation, nor should it be, as much remains unclear in medicine. Experience and judgment then, are the other coins-of-the-realm in veterinary medical practice. Trust in a veterinarian by a veterinary client must be earned by the provider, but cannot be legislated. HB 6396 will not change this.

We urge you to reject HB 6396.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Co-Chairs, Government Affairs Committee
Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association